

# LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD FOR GIRLS IN COMMUNITY SPORT

Coaching for gender quality

WOMEN  
**N**  
SPORT

LIFTING  
LIMITS

Gender stereotypes are embedded in us all. They lead to biases and inequalities with wide-reaching consequences for children. In sport we know that gender stereotypes can limit girls' sporting experience, undermine their sports skills, and with this their self-belief and joy. Girls from less affluent backgrounds, diverse communities and disabled girls may face additional barriers to sport. This guide will help you challenge the norm, tackle the gender play gap and champion the value of sport for all.

## WHY sport matters for girls.....

Sport gives girls resilience, courage, self-belief and a sense of belonging. It equips them with life skills and bolsters their physical health and wellbeing.

But far too many girls don't experience these lifelong benefits due to limiting gender stereotypes.

## WHY community sport can make the difference.....

Community sport can be a home from home for girls as well as boys. With the right opportunities, role models and experiences a girl can build a lifelong love of sport.

A good coach can transform a girls' life and ensure she continues and succeeds in sport.

## WHY boys matter.....

Boys play a significant role in the experiences of girls in sport. Boys should be expected to respect girls and be their allies, from the pitch to the clubhouse.

Sport can be a powerful way to unite people. Boys, as well as girls, benefit from a gender equal environment and from the mutual support that can offer.



# What Does 'Good' Coaching Look Like for Girls in Community Sport?

.....

If girls are to have meaningful experiences of sport, they need to feel understood and valued. Girls need to feel they belong in sport as much as boys. To make this possible and to avoid stereotyping:

## Coaches should recognise that...

- Irrespective of their personal experiences, gender inequality in sport is a continuing reality.
- Gender stereotypes run through all parts of children's lives:
  - Boys hear messages that sport is vital to their masculine status, they should be 'better' than girls, and never show vulnerability.
  - Girls hear that their looks are valued more than their skills and that it doesn't matter if they don't learn to play sport.
- As a result and despite their equal potential, a sporting skills gap exists for girls who arrive at community clubs with less movement skills than boys, but focused coaching can close the gap.

## Coaches should reflect upon...

- The language they use and its impact. We are all stereotyped and may unconsciously or consciously:
  - describe girls' leadership as 'feisty' or 'bossy', say 'we'll make sure the boys go easy on you' or 'have you finished your coffee morning' - this language would not be used for boys.
  - tell boys to 'toughen up', say they 'run like a girl' or excuse bad behaviour with 'boys will be boys' - this sends harmful messages to boys about themselves and about girls in sport.
- Their behaviours and attitudes towards female coaches, staff and parents, making sure these actively demonstrate respect.
- How to support parents and carers to understand that girls' needs may differ to boys due to stereotyping and biology, so parents can best inspire their daughters, and influence their sons' attitudes to girls.

## Coaches should remedy by...

- Demonstrating they value being a coach of girls as much as boys, and actively seek out opportunities to do so, showing pride in it.
- Investing additional time in improving girls' skills, providing girls with safe space to practice, away from unhelpful commentary.
- Avoiding stereotyping language and giving equal praise and recognition to girls.

# Coaching a Mixed Sex Group



Before puberty boys and girls are not physically different enough to require separation for safety reasons, especially in non-contact sport. Numbers may also make mixed sex sport more practical. However, due to stereotyping girls do not always thrive in mixed sex training, teams or competition. Coaches should take active steps to ensure girls can participate fully.

- Girls are involved equally in tactics, match play and leadership roles through effective team selection, drill rotations, and small group work, to ensure boys do not dominate.
- Girls should not be relegated to the least sought-after positions in teams or on tracks, but given equal opportunity to take all roles.
- Specific, constructive and skills-based feedback, recognition of progress and achievements are given in equal measure to girls and boys.
- Time is set aside for boys and girls to build cohesion through mutual support and recognition, which respects varied levels of skills.
- Value sportspersonship and teamwork, along with resilience, effort and respect in equal measure to outcomes. Results matter, but so does winning and losing well, and developing a healthy sporting mindset.
- Boys who treat girls as equals and show them respect are given more opportunities to lead. Boys who exclude girls (for example by not passing to them or socially excluding them) are firmly challenged, as are any derogatory comments about girls' abilities or appearance.

## Single Sex Provision

Single sex options in sport are important for girls. Although before puberty there is less difference between girls and boys in terms of innate physicality, stereotyping has already taken a toll so there is usually a skills gap. This combines with the impact of female puberty and, for some, cultural or religious beliefs. Single sex provision is increasingly important as girls enter adolescence if they are to continue sport.

Single sex provision can minimise the girls' fear of being watched or judged so they can feel free and joyful as they take part. Coaches should aim to choose pitches or sites out of the view of boys or men.

For girls to thrive, sessions for girls should be strictly girls-only, ideally with support from older girls and adult women, not least to help girls with managing their periods and changing bodies. Girls only sessions could be organised to coincide with women's only sessions.



# Creating an Equitable Environment Where Girls are Valued as Much as Boys

---

The whole sporting environment matters if women and girls are to feel they are welcome and belong. This includes the physical space and practical considerations but also the culture of the sporting community. In a gender equal environment:

## Equal opportunities and investment

- Pitch usage and facilities, coaching expertise and time, and leadership opportunities are shared equally between boys and girls.
- Training schedules and competitions give girls equal and fair access at sensible times.
- Girls' sports kit is thoughtfully designed and there are clean, safe female-only changing facilities with period products and sanitary bins.
- Social events, tours, trips, and coaching camps are offered equally to girls as boys.
- Equal effort is put into securing sponsorship and funding for girls' and women's teams as to boys' and men's teams.

## Equal visibility and recognition

- Female teams, athletes and role models are celebrated throughout the environment, for example in imagery on the walls.
- Any cups, trophies or vouchers offered as prizes or any celebratory events give equal weight to girls.
- Websites, social media, and newsletters give equal credit and profile to women and girls as men and boys.
- If you plan to screen live sport as a social occasion, be sure to include women's events in equal measure to men's.

## Equal representation and participation

- Time and resources are devoted to growing the girls' and women's games so there are sufficient numbers to make up single sex teams or squads and ensure gender-balanced participation.
- Women hold an equal number of coaching, officiating and decision-making roles as men, and if not, active steps are taken to address this.
- Support roles such as catering, kit washing and cleaning are shared equitably between men and women.
- Policies, codes of conduct, and messaging for staff, volunteers, parents and carers include zero tolerance of sexism and aggressive behaviour on or off the field of play.

